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By John H. Sudd. St. Martin's Press. 208 pp. Hard-cover \$8.25, soft-cover \$3.95.

### ANTS FROM CLOSE UP

By L. Hugh Newman. Photographs by Stephen Dalton and others. Crowell. 112 pp. \$6.95.

### THE ANT REALM

By Ross E. Hutchins. Dodd, Mead. 206 pp. \$4.50.

### THE WORLD OF THE ANT

By David F. Costello. Lippincott. 160 pp. \$5.95.

Review by William L. Brown Jr.

During the past half-century there have been surprisingly many popular books published on ants. Most of these seem to have been based largely on a single compendium, William Morton Wheeler's *ANTS*. In 1910, Wheeler's book was a fresh and authoritative source, but it has been reprinted four times since then without revision. An enormous amount has been learned about ants since 1910, but the popular literature has failed to reflect accurately this gain in knowledge. It unfortunately happened that the

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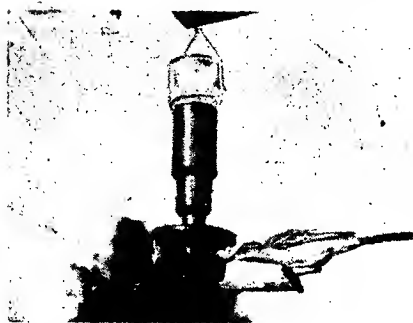
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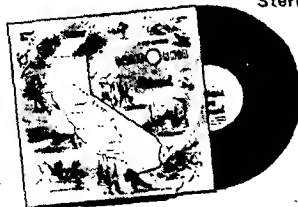
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few authors who did claim to write from  
an original viewpoint and original data  
were poorly informed, and their books  
accordingly range from the merely naive  
to the downright ludicrous.

Now at long last we are beginning to  
see some popular books on ants that are  
reasonably up-to-date and which, at the  
same time, get close to being factually  
accurate. The most important by far is  
John H. Sudd's AN INTRODUCTION TO  
THE BEHAVIOUR OF ANTS, an extremely  
rich mine of ant lore based largely on the  
investigations of the last twenty years.

Sudd's book is admirably compact and  
businesslike. To be sure, the writing is  
often awkward, partly because the author  
follows the regrettable tendency to com-  
maphobia, now epidemic in British tech-  
nical writing. But for the most part he is  
clear because his sentences are very short.  
Sudd's record—and it seems to be repre-  
sentative—shows that the main advances  
in the knowledge of ant behavior since  
World War II have been made in Britain,  
Germany, and the United States.

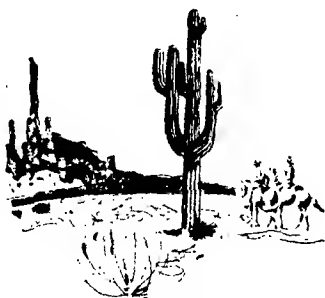
Particularly spectacular have been the  
discoveries on food-sharing behavior  
based on radioactive labeling techniques,  
and the growing appreciation of the role  
played by pheromones—specific chemi-  
cals that elicit adaptive responses from  
other members of the species—in the  
communal life of ants as well as other  
social insects.

Pheromones are to insect societies  
what hormones are to individual ani-  
mals and language is to human societies.  
This chemical communication, mediated  
through the senses of smell and taste, is  
a basic inheritance from nonsocial in-  
sects, in which pheromones are important  
mainly in courtship, and secondarily in  
territorial behavior.

Sudd's chapter on ant navigation is  
particularly interesting, and summarizes  
a great many observations, of which a  
number were not widely known until now.  
Ants find their way by visual orientation  
with respect to the sun and landmarks,  
and by means of odor trails, or combina-  
tions of these. Gravity is also taken into  
account when an ant shifts its position.  
Pathfinding of course differs greatly in  
ant species that live under different en-  
vironmental conditions.

These and many more topics in ant be-  
havior are dealt with in the book, and it  
is easily the most complete and critical  
work on the subject available. I do have  
a few criticisms, the most general of  
which is that some accounts of other  
authors are accepted by Sudd without  
the skepticism they deserve. There are  
also a few particular errors of fact. The  
spines of *Acacia* that swell to make ant  
domiciles apparently enlarge by them-  
selves, and the swelling is not caused by  
"some unidentified disease." No one  
(least of all this reviewer) has ever laid  
the paucity of thorns and the lack of ant





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symbionts in Australian *Acacia* to the "poorness of the Australian ant-fauna." Rather, the Australian ant fauna is exceedingly rich, and may well include 2,000 species. No comparable land area on Earth has more.

Sudd feels that "the effects of ants on the distribution of plants are not very striking," yet evidence exists to the contrary. In fact, a good many common plants, including our white trillium, bellwort, and bloodroot, have seeds that are distributed mainly by ants. In deserts, seeds of ant-gathered species often sprout and form rings around ant nests.

But such lapses are minor when they accompany so much good information so interestingly set forth.

The other two books under review fall far short of Sudd's standards of completeness and up-to-dateness so far as the text is concerned; but for the casual reader this lack may be compensated for by the high quality and profusion of their photographic illustrations. *ANTS FROM CLOSE UP* concentrates on the details in the life history of a "typical" species—one of the wood-ants of the *Formica rufa* complex. The subjects and the context are predominantly British, but fine photographs, particularly those by Edward S. Ross and M.F.W. Tweedie, also bring in a few interesting exotic subjects.

THE ANT REALM concentrates more on the variety of ants and their habits

around the world. The photographs are mostly very good indeed, and many of them are of subjects never before shown photographically in print. Occasional photographs are crudely posed or grossly mislabeled, as with one captioned, "An *Atta* queen (left) is very large in comparison to her workers." The photograph shows an *Atta* queen looming over a single worker of the harvester ant genus *Pogonomyrmex*.

The drawings in Hutchins' book are decorative, but sometimes inaccurate. The leaves of his *Cecropia* ant-tree are quite unlike the real thing; his Baltic amber *Lasius* is nearly as large as the ginkgo leaves and fruits with which it is shown, and on this scale would be about an inch long instead of the four millimeters or so that it really measures; his *Prionomyrmex* is badly drawn, and is shown with eight segments in the right antenna and seven in the left, instead of the twelve both antennae really possess.

In both books, the text contains more than a reasonable number of inaccuracies, ranging from misspellings of scientific names (this class of errors, it must be admitted, is also too frequent in Sudd's book) to the repetition of old errors, such as the claim that *Pheidole* harvester "miller caste" heads found scattered about the nest entrance in Arizona represented post-season sister-murders after "their work for the year was ended and

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*W. Shakespeare*



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their presence during the winter would be a useless drain on the colony's economy." W. S. Creighton has shown that in this particular case (*Pheidole militaria*), the large-headed caste acts as guardian soldiers, not grain-crushing "millers," and the decapitated heads probably belong to victims of underground battles with invading predatory ants of other genera. In the Argentinian chaco and in the Australian desert I have stumbled upon such battles taking place between subterranean army ants and settled ant colonies.

Newman has the fungus growers occurring "in South and Central America," while Hutchins has them ranging "all the way to Canada;" actually, north to New York City would be about right. Newman also accepts the point of view that the specialized ants that live in ant-plants generally do little or nothing to benefit the host plant. "The plants appear to grow just as well, other things being equal, whether the ants are there or not . . ." Much evidence already existed to oppose this notion, and now Dan Janzen's controlled study of the Mexican ant-acacia association has conclusively proved that the *Acacia* trees do not do as well without their ant guests as when these are in residence. Indeed, the very survival of some *Acacia* populations may depend on whether a strong *Pseudomyrmex* colony inhabits the plants and defends them

against insects and other herbivores, as well as competing plants.

Newman writes too often in anthropomorphic terms. Whether ants "develop a special group scent" that "makes them resentful of any interlopers" is still very much an open question, and words such as "resentful" should in any case not be applied to insects in the present state of our knowledge.

Hutchins discusses queen ant age maxima, and mentions a *Formica fusca* queen that lived for at least fifteen years, most of this time captive in an artificial nest, establishing "a record for longevity that will probably stand for a long while." But by 1936 this record had already been broken by a *Stenamma* queen at least 16 years old at her death, and I have heard that the record has been broken again more recently.

In discussing fossil ants, Hutchins writes, "One of the commonest ants of the Baltic amber was a black [mound-] building species (*Formica fusca*), but this same ant, little changed by time, is still common in Europe. There are at least eight species of ants found in Baltic amber that are identical to those living today." But *Formica fusca* is not known from the amber, and there are no species in the Baltic amber that are surely "identical" with living species. *Formica flori* of the amber is close to *Formica fusca*, as are several other amber

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species to modern counterparts. A more serious misunderstanding is embodied in Hutchins' statement. "The fact remains that even though the world and most of its animals have changed greatly, the ants apparently have changed but little." The real truth of the matter is that with the few exceptions mentioned, the Baltic amber ant fauna was very different from that which exists in Europe or anywhere else today. The dominant amber ants of genus *Iridomyrmex* (different species) are today confined to the Indo-Australian region and the New World (except for the man-introduced Argentine ant, which has invaded Mediterranean shores).

Other ants of genus after genus represented in the Baltic amber are today extinct, while such huge, world-dominating genera as *Phidole* and *Crematogaster* are absent from the amber, and there is no good reason to believe that they existed that early anywhere. The impression is gained from THE ANT REALM (and also from some well-known books on evolutionary theory) that ant evolution has been stagnant since Baltic amber times. This impression needs correction.

The points of criticism I have raised could be multiplied three times for these two latter books. This adds up to a lot of errors, far too many it seems to me, even for popular-science editions. This is a shame, for in many ways both books are an advance over the usual potboiler on the subject. They demonstrate amply that the photographic problems of such a book are more easily solved than is the composition of an accurate text or drawn figures. But with all their irritating faults, these books, particularly Sudd's, are better than anything else in their class, and they deserve a place on the complete natural history bookshelf.

THE WORLD OF THE ANT belongs to the same class as do the books by Newman and Hutchins. Like them, it is profusely illustrated with fine photographs, in this case all black-and-white, most taken by the author. Occasional photographs, such as the full-page landscape captioned "Harvester ant country in the Oregon desert," include no ants or the works of ants so far as I can see, and their relevance seems a bit tenuous.

Costello, who has been engaged in range management research for 30 years, in some ways gives us a fresh glimpse of semidesert ant ecology, but it is scarcely more than a glimpse, and things sometimes get confusing. The caption to one illustration tells us that "When cattle graze so closely that few plants can produce seeds, the harvester ant population is low. It will increase if grazing diminishes." But on the preceding page, we

Dr. William L. Brown, Jr., is professor of entomology at Cornell University. He has done extensive research on ants and has published more than 180 scientific articles on them.

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read: "The cows overgraze the grasses, a weedy plant cover develops with its seed supply relished by ants, and the ants increase in numbers." Obviously, we need a fuller explanation of the ant-livestock interaction.

The information in Costello's book is presented in four principal chapters, one for each season. This arrangement tends to fragment his account of the life history of the colony, and in fact the author does not always stick very close to the subjects of his own titles. Thus he covers a great deal of information in a somewhat disjointed way. Like the other books, this one has its errors and over-simplifications of fact and hypothesis, but they are not excessive. Coverage of the literature is of course very selective, but includes mention of much modern work on ant behavior and pheromones without going into depth on these subjects.

Speculation of former authors are occasionally accepted without the skepticism they deserve—for instance:

"The highly developed ants have thin integuments, are capable of producing large colonies, have greater intelligence, since their thin armor permits closer contact of the senses with the environment."

This statement betrays scant appreciation of what we know about the ant's sensory anatomy and physiology, or for the apparent evolutionary ascendancy of the "hard-shelled" Myrmecinae over the relatively "thin-shelled" Formicidae and Dolichoderinae. In spite of these shortcomings, the book is an engaging and substantial one, and it shows a laudable awareness of the broad ecological aspects of ant biology. ■

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